

REVIEWS

VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS by John Bowden, *SCM* 1977 pp. 85 90p paperback.

THE RESILIENT CHURCH by Avery Dulles, *Gill & Macmillan* 1978 pp. 229 £3.25 paperback.

THE OPEN CHURCH by Jürgen Moltmann, *SCM* 1978 pp. 128 £3.50.

Perhaps we should distinguish between *Theology of the Church*, and *Ecclesiology*; the former would locate discourse about the Church within a wider field—discourse about the purposes of God and the nature and destiny of man. Chapter 2 of Schillebeeckx's 'Christ the Sacrament' might count, then, as an example of *Theology of the Church*. *Ecclesiology* would refer to a more microscopic undertaking which limited itself to a discussion of topics like Authority and Dissent, Intercommunion etc., not adverting to the wider theological context.

My distinction is meant to convey a value-judgment. I would want to commend a work by saying 'Now that's a *real* bit of *Theology-of-the-Church*' (unwieldy, I admit); and to express a doubt about the adequacy of a work by saying, 'well, of course it's a workmanlike essay in *ecclesiology*....' That, in point of fact, is exactly what I'd want to say about Dulles' book; and he might well feel this to be an unfair slight; after all, you can only write about one thing at a time, and if you're writing about the Church you can't forever be bringing in stuff about God's purpose and the liberation of the oppressed. But with respect, you *must* be bringing in 'stuff about God etc.' all the time if it's theology you're doing; how else can even the most practical discussions of say, church polity, receive their proper, i.e. *theological, orientation*? (One of my reasons for admiring Rahner is that his pastoral theology is both pastoral and theological at the same time.)

So I would classify Dulles' book as *ecclesiology*, and, for all its radical differences, Bowden's book too. Some of Moltmann's essays, despite his own disclaimers, must be classed as *theology*, or at least as *theologically inspired rhetoric*.

'Voices in the Wilderness', by the editor and managing director of the *SCM* press, speaks for those who feel betrayed

by the turn of events in the last decade and a half; that period began with 'Honest to God' and high hopes of a radical renewal in the church (by which he seems to mean, on the whole, the *Church of England*). Periodicals like 'New Christian' carried the torch for a time; but then the torch seemed to go out, and the church lapsed into structural, doctrinal and liturgical conservatism. Even Dr Robinson has reverted to rather conservative work on Scripture. Bowden wonders whether the creative exploration of the transcendent isn't now being undertaken rather by secular thinkers like Philip Toynbee than by Christian theologians. Neither creative thought, nor the showing of caring, reconciling love are to be found at the centre of the churches. Those who are concerned for such things are near the periphery of the institution, or right outside it. They are the voices in the wilderness, and the institution seems bent on keeping them there.

The book itself hardly resembles a voice from the wilderness. Its tone is one of genteel frustration rather than thunderous anger. Perhaps some of the pain comes from the typical English proclivity for taking institutions too seriously, and consequently feeling scandalised when they aren't working properly; and perhaps more pain comes from the rather limited vision of the church in functional and institutional terms: "The churches primarily need to change because they are such inefficient means of showing the care and ... the possibilities for love and reconciliation and forgiveness which they profess." (p.9). True, very true. But if there isn't a theological vision enabling us to see the tatty institution in terms of a divine comedy, then the church is a farce in rather poor taste, and frustration rules o.k.

'The Resilient Church', subtitled 'The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation', is a collection of articles and lectures on

ecclesiological themes published or delivered in the past three or four years (though reworked for this book). The perspective is that of American Catholicism, whether in its own internal affairs (conservative vs progressive) or in its relation with mainstream American protestantism. Topics covered include the mission of the church, doctrinal development, modernity and the church, ideas of church membership, and intercommunion. Each chapter is a thoroughly competent essay, setting out the problem, outlining various proposed solutions (e.g. various conceptual models for the nature of doctrinal development of the church), and proposing a sound solution. The book includes two appendices, giving the texts of the Hartford Appeal (a declaration by an ecumenical group of theologians deploring the over-facile modernity of some attempts to reinterpret the gospel); and of the Cincinnati Affirmation (a pledge by various churches to work for mutual recognition of membership.) It has thorough documentation in footnotes—or rather backnotes. And an Index of 10 pages. It comes out moderate-progressive on questions of ecumenism and church authority (the hierarchy should welcome the creative possi-

ilities of dissent. Optimist); and conservative on questions of Church and World. It's very much from within one institution which has to relate to other institutions in an adaptive but not agonising way, and to a phenomenon outside called the World. I suspect all the chapters were conceived and written in places like the office to which he refers on p. 9. A walk in the hills would have been a help.

Moltmann's work is a collection of meditations written and spoken by him 'not as a pastor or a theology professor but as a member of the congregation'. They are subtitled 'Invitation to a Messianic Life-style', and do indeed invite the Christian congregation to allow Christ to come and break open their exclusiveness and enlarge their capacity for suffering and joy.

Of the three, this is the book I'm most likely to re-read. It isn't scientific theology. But theologians and ecclesiologists would be none the less scientific if they read it. I hope it comes out in paperback, without M. Douglas Meeks' introduction, and with some improvement of the translation (e.g. p. 65, lines 12, 13; p. 70, lines 6, 7).

COLIN CARR O.P.

THE GOSPEL THEN AND NOW by A. M. Hunter. SCM 1978. pp. 87 £1.10

A. M. Hunter has long been popular as a popularizer of Biblical—specifically New Testament—scholarship. Here he comes across more as a preacher and catechist. Part II of this small volume consists of articles he contributed to 'Life and Work', the record of the Church of Scotland. These articles are on the nature of the Gospels, the Cross, the Resurrection (considered as fact, as corporate Christian experience and as hope), and the Holy Spirit: thus far he remains within the realm of what one might call Biblical Theology; the other articles in Part II, on the Church, the Sacraments, the Christian Ethic and the Life to Come are rather more general catechesis, though the author would probably claim that they are biblically based.

Part I has an excellent little essay on Genesis 1-11, and some short expositions, devotional but with scholarly undergirding, on various favourite Old Testament passages (Psalm 23 etc.), and an enthusiastic introduction to Jesus ben Sira.

Part III, 'Christian Corollaries', shows us Hunter the preacher, and should be of interest to anthropologists among others because of what it shows as permissible within one homiletic culture that just wouldn't fit in another. For one thing there's copious quotations from wise men, Christian hymns and poems to give spice and authority to what's being said. This is from the final article, 'The Christ of Christian Faith': "As the spiritual flame burns low, our society degenerates. Predictably so: 'Where there is no vision', said the wise man long ago, 'the people perish', (or, more accurately, 'get out of hand', Prov. 29:18, Jerusalem Bible). When Sir Alec Douglas-Home asked Harold Macmillan at what point the rot had set in, that shrewd old man replied, 'When people stopped going regularly to church on Sundays.'" (p. 83). There are splendid sonorous generalisations, such as this from the essay on the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom: "Should